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With kind regards
W.S.

A LETTER,

ADDRESSED TO THE

EVANGELICAL MEMBERS OF THE
CHURCH OF ENGLAND,

IN CONSEQUENCE OF

An Appeal by the Vicar of Islington.

BY

THE REV. THOMAS BOWDLER, A.M.

LONDON :

JAMES DARLING, GREAT QUEEN STREET; LINCOLN'S
INN FIELDS.

AND

12 SOUTH SAINT ANDREW STREET, EDINBURGH.

1850.

LONDON :
Printed by G. BARCLAY, Castle St. Leicester Sq.

A LETTER,

&c. &c.

MY DEAR BRETHREN,

Suffer, I pray you, a word, addressed with no unkind intention, by one who, though he may shrink from assuming the appellation by which you are called, would desire to be what that word imports, in heart and life, in speech and action. It is, I presume, the acknowledged title of that portion of the members of the Church of England to whom Mr. Wilson has addressed his "Appeal." He makes what may be deemed an apology for applying the term "Romanizing" to a certain party, to which he is strongly opposed; but the title "Evangelical" is put prominently forward, and must, therefore, be taken as that by which you are to be known and distinguished. And I could find in my heart to congratulate you upon your possession of it. None, surely, can be better suited to mark the disciples of Him whose office was to

preach the Gospel, and by whose Spirit we all desire to be guided and animated. One could say of it, as was beautifully said of a kindred name, used as a party distinction, and, alas ! “bandied in derision’s game,”—

“ Oh, give me but some sign,
Some seal, to prove the title mine ;
And warmer thanks thou shalt command,
Than bringing kingdoms in thine hand.”

Only let the style and title be a true sign of the temper of those who enjoy it : let that be spoken of them, and more than that, which was said of the early Christians ; not only, Behold how these Evangelicals love one another ! but, Behold how they love even those whom they count their enemies !

I would willingly discover a proof of this in the “party term,” by which Mr. Wilson, with some expression of regret, designates those to whom he is strongly opposed. Ill suited as is the title of “Romanizers” to them, and unjust towards them, yet, like the term “Tractarians,” it affords encouragement of an approach towards a greater exercise of charity, that the name of an individual, loved and honoured for his many virtues, even by those who differ from him ; and especially for possessing, beyond most men, those graces which the Apostle has set before us, as “the fruits of the Spirit ;” should be no longer “bandied in derision’s game.” We can hope better things,



and rejoice in the hope, when we think we see the shaft of ridicule put into the quiver, instead of trembling upon the string, and shooting out bitter words ; of which he is the last man who should supply—I blush to speak it—a nickname for party use, and a jest for fools.

But if the Romanizers, as they are called, submit to bear the reproach, waiting till their principles being better understood, and their adherence to the Church, shall prove the injustice of it, let not things that they know not be laid to their charge—things which would make them traitors to the cause of truth and godliness ; which they shudder to read of, even among the followers of Socinus, or avowed Deists. I know not what means of judging them Mr. Wilson may possess, nor whom he would bring within the broad sweeping censure of Romanizing ; many perhaps, if not all, who hold strongly and essentially the doctrine of Regeneration in Baptism, and esteem highly the privilege of daily Church services and frequent Communion, as special means of grace ; who, without extravagance or excess, would do honour to the Sacraments, and therefore “ withdraw the reading desk and pulpit from the centre of the Church, in order to give a full view of the sacred Table.” Of Romanizing preachers he asserts,—“ The gracious invitations of the Gospel are kept out of sight ; the great atonement for sin passed over ; the Cross of

Christ seldom alluded to ;" and more, much more, which it were painful to record.*

Far from me and my friends be the substitution of Heathen philosophy for Gospel truth ! But far too be the mind which can make statements such as this, and more, many more such, which a spirit of truth and meekness will be loth to describe in suitable terms ! To " preach Christ crucified, as the power of God, and the wisdom of God," has been with us, at once the foundation of all doctrinal instruction, and the moving principle in every exhortation to godliness of living.

It puts me to shame that I should thus take upon myself to answer for my brethren. But it may be permitted, perhaps, to refer to forms of devotion which are likely to be of common use among them. Perhaps, about this hour of the present day, there may be many who are praying after Archbishop Laud,—“Look upon me, O Lord, but not till thou hast nailed my sins to the Cross of Christ; not till thou hast bathed me in the Blood of Christ; not till I have hid myself in the Wounds of Christ; that so the punishment which should else overtake me may pass over me: then look, and say unto my soul, I have forgiven thee; and by the work of thy mercy in my soul make me feel it, through Jesus Christ our only Lord and Saviour.” Or with Bishop Andrewes, in

* See p. 13, &c.

words which are, indeed, too solemn to be here set down. Neither of these names may possibly be held in much honour by some of those whom I am addressing; but let it be remembered that they, the depth of whose piety is so affecting, were among the stoutest of antagonists that Rome has had to encounter. Or let me quote one little sentence from a writer of the present day, who, as I guess, deserves, without claiming it to himself, the title which you bear:—"Belief of my danger, of God's love, of Christ's atonement, of the Spirit's power—this would make me able in Him to do all things."* Yet let one passage be added from his Preface:—"To have any other shelter than the Cross of Christ, is to have no shelter at all. They who have any real hope seek it here. This will, in His own good time, be found alike the stay of all; and the knowledge of Jesus, and communion with Him, will increase hour by hour to those that seek it, until the soul loses the remembrance of its own misery in the abiding sense of His presence and His love." Surely if the strength of the party from whom danger is apprehended be estimated by the number of those who "keep out of sight the gracious invitations of the Gospel, pass over the great atonement for sin, seldom allude to the Cross of Christ:" or again, either "avowedly or

* "Daily Steps towards Heaven. For Wednesday in the Seventeenth Week after Trinity."

covertly reject all the great fundamental doctrines of the Gospel, as laid down in the Word of God, and re-asserted at the Reformation,—the spiritual work of sanctification, a holy life and conversation, the fruit of Divine grace in the soul; all spiritual life and experimental knowledge of the truth discarded as fanatical ;”—if, I say, the strength of the party to which Mr. Wilson opposes himself be reckoned by such, he need scarce have dipped his pen in ink, much less in gall. We could almost imagine him to have under his eyes some sermons preached a century ago, when the religion of nature was in vogue. So, again, of those who have addressed their diocesan in censure of Mr. Gorham’s opinions, or who attended the great meeting at St. Martin’s Hall, how many are there who practise bowings and prostrations towards the altar?

It is with “great heaviness and sorrow of heart” that one sees occasion for making these remarks. At a time when the whole united strength of the Church needs to be put forth to stop the progress of Infidelity on the one side, and Romanism on the other, aided, both of them, by a latitudinarian Government; when many would endure to be called by a hard name, if they could find a common ground upon which Churchmen, who (as is supposed) differ more in words than in principles, might meet, and oppose their common enemies; there is issued from a par-

ticular quarter a trumpet call, summoning the forces who are leagued on that side, to meet and put down their adversaries. And this in a strong party-spirit. For what can indicate such a temper more clearly than the comprehending in one broad bill of indictment all who differ from them, whether in outward form, or essential doctrine? We desire much to know upon what authority this summons comes forth. Has it the sanction of the chief among you, brethren? of those whom you would acknowledge as your leaders? We will not believe it. Has it the approbation of another high authority—the Metropolitan of India? We can hardly suppose that the Vicar of Islington would stand forward, as he here does, without the approbation of his lordship. I would not be thought to intrude impertinently, in any sense of the word, upon the privacy of family intercourse; but it is of much importance, when the forces are mustered for the fight, that our doubts and perplexities should be relieved so far as may be done. It has been understood that several distinguished persons among you, who would be thought worthy of honour, have expressed a difference of opinion from Mr. Gorham, and stated openly that they did not hold with him. Are they prepared to wink at the extreme opinions which they do not approve, for the purpose of establishing their own views? to unite in taking “active measures for removing offending members,” *scil.* Tractarians,

“from the Church?” to unite in adopting the Articles of Religion as the one basis of union; ignoring the Book of Common Prayer, to which those who minister among you have declared their unfeigned assent and consent? It is a singular contrast now presented to the public eye: on the one side, that of an earnest striving after union among the brethren, upon points where they can agree without compromise of principle; and on the other, the denouncing of those who differ from them, as those “who have bowed the knee to Baal;” and, “merging minor differences among themselves upon subordinate points” (the denial of grace given to infants in and by Baptism being one of these!), for the sake of crushing those whom they deem enemies to the truth.

It is much to be considered, and I pray you to give your best attention to it, that of those who have left us to seek a rest for perturbed spirits in the Roman Communion, perhaps the greater part have been bred and nurtured in what are called Evangelical principles. This excites no surprise among those who, like our Reformers, look to the Church in the first ages for truth in doctrine and worship. They see, in principles half leaning to Church and half to Dissent, a want of reality of some points upon which the heart and mind may stay themselves; a want of power derived from the Divine source of power, and of assurance of His presence; a want of much that He

has ordained in His Church for the benefit of His people from the beginning. It is no marvel if such as have never known the truth of apostolical succession, and of a real spiritual presence of Christ, are led to a vicious excess in extolling what they have hitherto been taught and accustomed to hold in no esteem. It is but one out of a thousand instances of the weakness and perverseness of human nature ; of the manner in which the author of evil turns to his own bad purposes the inbred disposition of man to rush from one extreme to another. Suppose now a young person of a reverential tone of mind, with much warmth of feeling and ardour of devotion, seeking the means of giving vent to a full heart, and at the same time desiring counsel and control, and the friendly aid of some minister of God's word and sacraments, who may speak with authority for guidance and direction, hearing and resolving of doubts, and giving assurance of pardon and grace ; if such a tender and delicate spirit, taking delight in the services of the Church, and desiring a more frequent attendance upon them, and especially upon the Sacrament of Christ's body and blood, should be told, as is not unlikely, " Oh, you are half a Papist already ; " * and should in

* " Such . . . is the pitiless part,
 Some act by the delicate mind,
 Regardless of wringing and breaking a heart,
 Already to sorrow consigned." ^

an unlucky hour be tempted to enter the precincts of a Roman Catholic church ; and, lured by the exhibition of piety and a gorgeous ceremonial, be induced to consult a priest ; who will hear the confessions of the sick soul, pronounce authoritative absolution, and dismiss the penitent with counsels and a benediction, “ Go in peace ;” and all that has been before regarded with horror be hid from view, or turned into objects of love and veneration ;—we may mourn, and blame such a one a little, and ourselves more, but cannot wonder if the yearning heart find there employment and rest. Or suppose one of stronger mind, searching after the truth, and sincere in making the search, finding (as he cannot fail to do) much to disappoint, and little to satisfy, in the faith and practice of the Evangelical school, as embodied in Mr. Wilson’s “ Appeal,” and exhibited in some churches according with, if not led by, his teaching ; may he not argue thus with himself,—“ The Church is the pillar and ground of the truth ;” and there, therefore, is the sacred deposit to be found. And where is that Church ? Not, surely, where Calvinism, or Zuinglianism (to speak more truly), is admitted upon equal terms of favour with the Catholic doctrine taught in every age : where a boastful display is made of adherence to the principles of the Reformation ; while the Book of Common Prayer, which was then compiled, is slightly treated ; and the real presence, which

Ridley (perhaps of greatest note among the martyrs) professed with his dying breath, is rudely pushed aside and disclaimed : where a civil court, however composed, may give judgment on doctrine ; “ and the Queen, pronouncing a final sentence in ecclesiastical matters judicially referred to her, is said to be the Church herself, deciding Church matters by her recognised head : ” and even this is but a shadow and a pretence ; for the prerogative of the Crown is seized and swayed by a Minister who will make the highest and most sacred appointments at his will and pleasure ; and the ancient court of the Church is treated with mockery and derision ; and the State has no settled principles of religion ; and that which was falsehood yesterday is truth to-day ; and the Church of Rome is flattered, supported, and encouraged ; and all denominations of Dissenters have favour shown them indiscriminately ; and the Church has no one form of government, and no settled doctrine ; and if an attempt be made to restore to her her ancient rights, or to give her the power of deciding on questions of doctrine, it is crushed at once, and put down with a strong hand ; and this state of things is approved by the Evangelical body, who are called upon to support a lax and latitudinarian Government ! Can the truth be here ? It must have been in the primitive Church : but the organ of the Evangelicals dates altogether from the Reformation,

and appears to ignore or renounce the very principle upon which the Fathers then proceeded,—viz. a reference to the three first centuries ; the truth may be, however overgrown and hidden, in the Church of Rome, which, moreover, is flattered, for political uses, and even encouraged by our rulers : there, too, is authority ; there is a system of doctrine ; there is a living and true spiritual head—the lineal successor of St. Peter (as is said), and, if so, the inheritor of the power which our Lord delegated to His apostle : there is power to send forth bishops into foreign lands, and bring all nations into obedience to itself : there is power to erect gorgeous cathedrals and sees, and raise the cross and plant the crozier in them : and there is power over the souls of men, to absolve or expel. Such power it has of God.

“ And here choose I, joy be the consequence.”

And joy there will be for a time, as has been expressed by one of the last, and noblest, and best, though not perhaps the stoutest, of her converts ; trained during early years in your school. But, alas ! “ all that glisters is not gold :” there will be much, too, of tinsel and ornament :

“ And ornament is but the gilded shore
To a most dangerous sea.”

Let those who embark upon it look to the consequence. But I ask, Whether the above cases may

not be taken to represent what often occurs? and whether, whatever may be thought of the process of mind and feeling, or course of argument, as here set down, the fact is not clear and indisputable, that of those who have left our ranks, many, or most of them, have been bred in the Evangelical school? And let me add, that unless things are strangely altered amongst us, and history is, indeed, only "an old almanac," and not, as it has been heretofore, capable of exercising a prophetic office, or of uttering a warning voice, Rome is likely to make a sad havoc in that quarter. How the case stands at Islington Mr. Wilson can bear witness,—better, I ween, than of the style of doctrinal preaching among the Romanizers. But report speaks of much progress being made by the Roman Catholics in those parts. We know that of old Rome could make common cause with the Puritans; and well was it for the Church of England that she had giants in her citadel in those days. Yet she was mastered and overthrown for a time; and hardly recovered her full strength when she rose and stood upright. And a century and a half of dreary character followed, upon which we look back with horror at the cold indifference and unbelief of many in the higher ranks, and the scattering of the poor as sheep that had no shepherd; and with wonder at the mercy of God which preserved a "remnant, as the flock in the midst of their fold."

Let me be permitted, in conclusion, first, to ask, What is the period which Mr. Wilson selects for “the reassertion of the great doctrines of the Gospel at the Reformation?” Not, I presume, the days of Cranmer and Ridley. Perhaps the year 1562, when the Thirty-nine Articles were agreed upon. Let us know what is meant, and we may have more to say.

Secondly, May I venture to suggest to those who have declared their solemn assent and consent to the Book of Common Prayer, whether this does not deserve greater reverence at their hands than to be kept out of sight, for the purpose of making the Articles the sole criterion and bond of Evangelical union? And if the Articles of Religion are to be taken in a literal and grammatical sense, (though, indeed, the Judicial Council seem a little doubtful how to determine upon some points in them), whether such assent to the Prayer-book does not require that it, too, should be so understood; not that here only a hypothetical construction should be forced upon the plainest language that can be used?

Thirdly, recurring once more to the glorious title by which you are distinguished, be this consideration laid much to heart, that it is a pledge for the adoption of the purest Gospel principle; and that principle is Love. If the title of “Evangelical” be assumed as a party designation, distinctively and exclusively, can we fail to be reminded, with very painful recollection,

of those who said, “ Stand by thyself, I am holier than thou ? ” Must we not say that the assumption of such a designation is an act of schism,—a grievous breach of the law of charity, and unity, and peace ? And what pregnant examples have we before us in the history of those who have, in times past, taken similar distinctions to themselves ? Little need have we to dive into the records of past ages, when the famous 16th century exhibits the origin and progress of the Puritans ; telling, as with a warning voice, of the danger of separation, and breach of unity and obedience ; which, aiming at first at greater purity within the pale of the Church, gradually fell into alienation from it, holding false doctrine, and practising bitter persecution. From schism, no less than from false doctrine and heresy, Good Lord, deliver us !

Let it be considered how short a period intervened between Jewel’s Sermon at St. Paul’s Cross, containing his famous Challenge to the Papists, and his last Sermon in censure of the Puritans ; and the events which marked the interval ;—the growing dislike of the Puritans to the Church, and the advance of Popish pretensions ; the rejection of the English Liturgy by the former, and the issuing of the Bull of Pius V., which excommunicated our Queen, and absolved her subjects from their allegiance ; and how the principles of each party were adverse to her government ; and both were leagued against the Church ;—and it may

be seen how great was the danger to rule and order from their plots and machinations, whether separately or in union. Here is surely a timely warning. The grasping ambition of Rome is perhaps greater than ever. Its success has hitherto been comparatively small. But let Mr. Wilson muster his forces, and join those of a latitudinarian government, and it may march on proudly, or rest securely upon its arms ; it will “have met with foes that strike beside it.”

Mr. Wilson has sought to justify his heavy charge against his brethren, in an Appendix to the third edition of his “Appeal,” wherein, alas ! by way of aggravation, he has accused them of the grossest hypocrisy before God and man. It must be remarked that a sentence is introduced into the “Appeal,” which serves for a point of reference. Whether it is quite fair to make a score of alterations in a new edition of a tract, without notice, is not worth considering, as they are of no great importance ; but this mode of dealing with his readers is scarcely what might be expected. Mr. Wilson offers neither proof nor explanation of the statements, some of which I have quoted ; nor any justification of the hard names, with which I have been unwilling to stain my paper ; but gives “a few specimens of the system of Divinity to which he alludes.” These are drawn from Mr. Newman’s “Lectures on Justification,” from No. 80 of “Tracts for the Times ;” and from Dr. Pusey’s

"Letter to the Bishop of Oxford," and the Preface to his Tract on "Baptism." Such passages, even taken by themselves and without explanation, are absolutely worthless for the purpose of sustaining the charges which he has brought against that large and influential body, which he would crush with a strong hand.—The last paragraph in the Appendix must not be passed over in silence.

In much simplicity, but, as it should seem, in ignorance and folly, I have mentioned the forms of devotion used by the so-called Romanizers, as a just test of their sentiments and feelings before God. But, as if by anticipation, Mr. Wilson asserts that they are not to be judged by their books of devotion. Now, there are persons who do not scruple to express in prayer and thanksgiving, as the Church directs, their belief in the fact that every infant which is brought to God in baptism is actually regenerated in that sacrament; while, in their teaching, they deny the possibility of this, and the truth of the doctrine which the Church sets forth: much as the Roman Catholics have for a long time past been allowed to mention the immaculate conception of the Blessed Virgin in prayer, though the doctrine was not declared, as a matter of faith. But we have been willing to suppose that such persons were neither self-deceivers, nor intentionally deceivers of others; that by some process which we could not understand, nor reconcile to our own rule of interpretation, they felt

justified in putting an hypothetical meaning upon the words to which I allude. — And this has been confirmed by the Judicial Council; not thereby, probably, intending that all plain and positive assertions in the Book of Common Prayer may be so dealt with, but only those which relate to the Sacrament of Baptism. Thus we desire to relieve our minds from unkind thoughts towards our brethren. But no such tenderness is shown by Mr. Wilson towards those whom he opposes. (And, in sober truth, if there were, it would be very different from the spirit and tone which mark his “Appeal.”) Those who use the devotions of Andrewes and Laud (to repeat the time-honoured names which I have before mentioned) are not to be judged by “the devotional fervour” with which they pour out their souls before God. The most humiliating confession of sin, the strongest expressions of reliance on the atonement made by Christ, and the most earnest supplications for divine grace—all these pass for nothing; they do but blind the eyes of “the less-experienced reader.”

And can they be for nothing? Can these, and such-like forms of devotion, drawn from Holy Scripture, from the Church in its first and purest ages, and from our own Liturgy, which is little else than a transcript of these, be no true index of the state of heart and mind, of feeling and of judgment, in those who use them? When Bishop Andrewes wetted his manuscript with his tears, and when those who follow

him vex and reproach themselves with the coldness and dryness of their hearts and eyes, had he, or have they, “that deep-seated dislike to the truth as it is in Jesus, and to the distinctive doctrines of grace, which the Apostle describes as the carnal mind which is enmity against God?”* Was there nothing but a “smoldering Pharisaism” * in the solemn stillness during prayer, and the loud Amen, and the union of thousands of voices in repeating the Lord’s Prayer, which (as is generally reported by those who were present), distinguished the assembling of themselves together in St. Martin’s and Freemasons’ Halls?

No, it is not so. Those who are so evil spoken of show their doctrines by their prayers, the deep thoughts of their hearts by the words upon their lips. They know that in Adam all have died, and they seek a new birth in Christ Jesus; and own thankfully His great goodness in providing a holy ordinance, which shall be at once the means of conveying this grace, even to the new-born babe, and a pledge and assurance, a sure sign and seal thereof. They feel deeply in themselves that corruption which remains even in the regenerate, and the power of besetting sin; and while they strive earnestly and labour diligently, they pray mightily for that grace which alone is effectual to cleanse them from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, supply all their needs, and make them

* “Appeal,” p. 3.

continually to be given to all good works. Once more, trusting to the words of their Saviour, that in the union of his disciples with Him, in feeding upon his body and blood, is everlasting life, they seek above all things that “He may dwell in them, and they in Him, He be one with them, and they one in Him.” And here, again, acknowledging with grateful hearts the “grace and truth which came by Jesus Christ,” manifested in the ordinance which He has appointed for fulfilling his gracious promise, they offer to Him the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and seek to have their “souls strengthened and refreshed by the body and blood of Christ, which are verily and indeed taken and received by the faithful in that sacrament.” This is indeed “something more than the simple communion of their Saviour’s love;” though that expression, it is hoped, implies more than a mere remembrance of his death, the low doctrine of the Hoadleian School. But this which we have here set down is the teaching of the blessed Apostle of the Gentiles, and of our own Church. And let not those who seek a blessing from Christ’s presence in the weekly celebration of these holy mysteries, or the daily service of the Church, be evil spoken of, as if “all spiritual life and experimental knowledge of the truth were discarded by them as fanatical, and religion almost entirely reduced to a matter of form and external observance.” For here is that sweet union with their dear Lord and one another, by which the flame of divine love is kept

brightly burning within them, animating and encouraging them to all the duties and charities of life..

Let such be the spirit, brethren, breathed and nurtured within us by the divine Spirit of love and holiness, with which we meet for discussion, or even controversy, from whatever quarter we set forth. And this, for the sake of truth, no less than of peace. For surely the time is not to come only, but is even now, “when three words uttered with charity and meekness shall receive a far more blessed reward,” the present reward being the composing of differences, and conviction of truth, “than three thousand volumes written with disdainful sharpness of wit.”* Let then even our censure of each other tend “to provoke unto love and to good works;” and to “the assembling of ourselves together,” for obtaining the grace of God to descend mightily upon our hearts, and upon the Church,—the mother and teacher of us all through the divine Word, and in Him the close bond of fellowship and holy communion.

And lastly, let this be the temper in which this address is made and accepted. It would come to you without a name, which is little worth, but for the advice of those whom the writer esteems highly. He is willing likewise, since various parties are brought into the field, to speak openly the sentiments of one

* May we not all meet, as upon common ground, in the study of the mind and temper and writings of Hooker, and of the grace which was upon him ?

of those, “the old High Church party,” which Mr. Wilson, *suo more*, treats somewhat harshly. They would be content to endure neglect, but it is hard to be thought capable of “hatred.” Such terms are, alas ! “familiar with him as household words.” But let discord cease. The shades in which these lines have been written, far away from the busy scenes which gender strifes, may inspire better and higher thoughts, while they teach the excellence of order and obedience. “Almighty God hath created and appointed all things in heaven, earth, and waters, in a most excellent and perfect order.”* “The blessed obedience and order of angels” was the subject of Hooker’s dying contemplation. And those whose happiness it is to dwell, even for a short time, in the midst of the lower works of God, may be tempted to utter a pious wish like that with which that excellent servant of God sighed out his soul, Oh, that it might be so among men—the noblest of His works upon earth ! Oh, that they who should reflect most perfectly their Maker’s image in all its lineaments, should not alone be found to disturb the harmony by which stars move in their courses, and winds and storms fulfil his word !

* “Homily on Obedience,” First part.

